

## **CURA RESOURCE COLLECTION**

**Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
University of Minnesota  
330 Humphrey Center**

# **Outreach to Hmong Americans on the East Side of St. Paul**

Conducted on behalf of the  
Hmong Task Force

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## **Introduction**

The Hmong Task Force of the East Side of St. Paul is a participant in COPC (the Community Outreach Partnership Center), a multi university and agency project that is funded by HUD (the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development). The Task Force is chaired by Fu Hang of the Asian Development Corporation and Neal Thao, Associate professor at Metropolitan State University and staffed by May Chuyangheu and Sheng Thao, graduate students at the University of Minnesota.

This report will contain a short description of our research process followed by findings, recommendations and a listing of resources related to the three areas of concern: housing, economic development, and work readiness.

## **Research Process**

The purpose of this research project has been to gather information about the housing, economic development and workforce readiness of the Hmong community on the East Side of St. Paul. The researchers talked with forty four Hmong residents of the East Side. Twelve individuals were interviewed and thirty two participated in three focus groups. In addition to talking with Hmong residents, the researchers also gathered information about the resources available related to housing, economic development and workforce readiness.

## HOUSING

The East Side of St. Paul has changed in many different ways over the years. Not only has it changed in terms of diversity, but also in the business and housing sectors. In St. Paul, the East Side has become a new home for many Hmong families. Within the past years, because of the monthly increase in rents and home mortgages, there was pressure for many families to pursue buying a home. However for many Hmong families there is lack of credit history and education about the process of becoming a homeowner.

### **The Research Process**

The research consists of seven individual interviewees and a focus group of 20 people. The individual interviews were conducted with Hmong homeowners residing on the East Side. Five questions were asked about their views on housing and about other services that they felt was a need on the East Side. The interviews followed by a focus group of 20 people who were participants in the Home Buyer Education Workshop (HomeLink Program). This focus group consisted of current renters interested in owning a home or who were in the process of buying a home. The participants were assured confidentiality in terms of the identification of their names or ages.

### **Findings**

When the researchers met with the 20 Hmong residents to talk about their housing situation, we found a great interest in owning a home. In response to the question, "*What was your occupation and family size five years ago?*", we learned that 50% had worked during the

past five years, 65% held minimum pay jobs, 35% were students or have not worked within the past five years and that 15% were without a job. We learned that the Hmong families were large. Ninety percent had four children or more. When asked "*Why didn't you own a home five years ago,*" half of the participants told us that they were not ready for various reasons. Twenty five percent talked about not having enough money. Twenty percent were college students and five percent did not have a secure job at the time. When asked "*what are the challenges that kept you from buying a home,*" the participants had many concerns. A quarter of them spoke about their lack of income. Twenty percent were maintaining student status so it was not possible or affordable to own a home. Several other reasons emerged, such as family size, no down payment, no resources, not ready, rather rent, and unknown. In response to the question, "*Why do you want to own a house now?*", we learned that 40% wants to be their own landlord while 40% fear the increase in renting, 15% wanted ownership of a home for security before starting a family and 5% now have a stable job and are able to buy.

In addition to conducting the focus group, the researchers also interviewed seven Hmong residents from the East Side. These people told us that they felt the housing in the areas was in need of improvement, but that they considered it "fair". One interviewee considered the housing to be "good". When asked "*What do you think is a need for the Hmong families residing on the eastside?*", two people said housing and others said Asian stores, more training and more Asian establishments and jobs. In response to the question "*What is affordable housing for you?*", four people called for lower or no down payment and called for low interest rate for first time homebuyers. Another question was, "*What resources would be more useful to you when you need fixing done on your home?*" Four participants mentioned

Hmong agencies, two said outside family members and one mentioned a bank as useful. The final question asked, " *What kinds of housing would you like to see on the eastside?*" Three participants wanted to see more rambler homes, two suggested more single family homes, and two different people called for more duplexes and apartments.

## **Challenges**

We learned from the interviews and the focus group that there are great concerns about housing on the East Side. The interviewees liked the eastside in which they reside, but they felt it deserves some improvement in one way or another. Some felt the East Side needed more affordable housing, while others felt it needed more Hmong agencies which can provide some sort of assistance to them. The focus group participants indicated that there are many challenges for first time homeowners. Some challenges are no down payment, no credit history and the lack of houses large enough for larger families.

## **Resources**

The following are resources identified by the Hmong COPC Task Force on housing which services the Hmong residence on the East Side. Outside resources are also listed for reference. The purpose it serves will be broken down into three category such as *education* (a source for information or training), *advocacy* (a source for affordable housing) or *funding* (a source of home financing/home improvements).

### **Resources on the Eastside for Housing**

ADC (Asian Development Corporation)  
NENDC (North East Neighborhood Development Corporation)  
Dayton's Bluff Housing Development

### **Purpose it serves**

advocacy  
funding, advocacy  
advocacy, funding

Home Realtors (Keystar Realty, Koe Realty, At-Home Realty, Golden Gate)	advocacy
Banks (Wells Fargo Bank, US Bank, V-Loans)	funding
Metropolitan State University	education
Public Housing Agency	education, advocacy, funding
City Housing	advocacy, funding

### **Outside Resources for Housing**

### **Purpose it serves**

Family Housing Fund	funding, advocacy, education
Minnesota Housing Financing Agency	funding, advocacy, education
Common Bond	funding, advocacy, education
Habitat for Humanity	funding, advocacy, education
Banks	funding
State legislators	advocacy, funding
-Trimble	
-Kelly	
Federal programs	funding, advocacy, education
-all block grants	
Foundations	funding, advocacy

### **Recommendations**

- Collaboration among Asian real estate agencies to network and promote affordable housing.
- Available and affordable rental housing
- More outreach services for home improvement such as Dayton Bluff Housing, ESNDK and others if not already providing services.
- Take advantage and utilize resources on the eastside-refer to resources list.



## **JOB ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The purpose of this research is to gather information and resources about job economic development of the Hmong businesses that resided on the Eastside. The Hmong people have resided on the Eastside of St. Paul since the late 70's and have started some small business since the mid 80's. Some of these business are service related such as real estate business, oriental grocery stores and video stores. Since the 90's, Hmong has developed many kinds of small businesses on the Eastside. Some of these businesses are non-profit organizations, laundromat, a medical clinic, restaurants, counseling services, real estates agencies, temporary agencies, oriental stores, mortgage company, youth services, life and auto insurance agencies. These businesses are owned by Hmong individual.

### **Research Process**

A focus group with eight participants and an individual interviews were conducted with five Hmong business owners on the Eastside. The focus group was held at Eastside Neighborhood Development Corporation (ESNDC) and there were seven males and one female that attended. Four of these people are business owners and the other four are working professionals that work in eastside programs that assist the Hmong people. The purpose of this focus group was to identify the challenges of job and economic development and also to formulate objectives and goals for the Hmong businesses on the East Side.

The five individual interviews were with Hmong businesses on the Eastside. These included a non-profit organization, counseling service, two oriental stores and a home daycare. These organizations were located in planning districts 1, 2, 4 and 5 in St. Paul.

The data collection for the job and economic development focus group was an open discussion format with the group. This group was assured of confidentiality. The data collection with the four businesses and one non-profit organization consisted of an individual interview with a set of seven survey questions. Some of the questions were open-ending question and others were fixed responses.

## **The Findings**

The business owners who attended the focus group felt that there are many challenges that are preventing them from not being successful with their business. Their concerns are:

a. Legislation (road block)

- ♦ Political policy always stands in their way.

a. Token support in name, all talk, and no actions.

- ♦ You talk the talk, but you don't walk the walk.

b. No community feedback, no communication.

- ♦ The reason is no community system.

c. Standards

- ♦ Hmong people are treated differently. They are not given the same chance as others. For example; bank loans, lack of funding for Hmong businesses.

d. Ability

- ♦ The Hmong community is lacking certain work skills.

e. Stereotype, Hmong stereotype and racism.

- ♦ The Hmong community feels that they are looked upon differently because of the color of their skin.

f. System procedure is unfair.

- ♦ Job development procedure.

g. Not comfortable with system, comfort level.

h. Not following regular rules.

- ♦ Hmong business community might not understand rules and regulation system.

i. No local Hmong politician.

- ♦ There is no Hmong politician to lobby on behalf of the Hmong community.

j. Institution racism.

k. Not hiring enough Hmong employee.

l. Cultural issues vs. Western culture.

m. Hinderance of ability to create job.

n. No favoritism

- ♦ Hmong people feel there is always something that stands in their way of getting a job.

p. Understanding of regulation/rules.

The findings for the five individual interviews are from the seven survey questions.

**1. *How do you feel about business on the Eastside?***

- ♦ Two respondents responded that businesses on the Eastside need many improvements.
- ♦ Two respondents responded that businesses are fair.
- ♦ One respondent stated that business on the Eastside is good.

**2. *What kind of business do you think is need for the Hmong families on the Eastside?***

- ♦ Two respondents feel that the Hmong people need more social service agencies on the Eastside.
- ♦ One respondent feels that more Laundromat is needed.
- ♦ One respondent feels that manufacturing jobs and affordable healthcare are also needed for small Hmong business.
- ♦ One respondent feels that Hmong needs a good central system to manage business data on the Eastside.

**3. *What kind of services does your agency provide?***

- ♦ One business provides counseling service such as mental health issues for the Hmong people.
- ♦ One business provides culturally appropriate daycare services to all races.
- ♦ Two businesses provide oriental foods and videos.
- ♦ The non-profit organization provide interpreter and transportation services, act as advocacy for Hmong elders and parents to pass the citizenship exams. They also provide domestic violence program, resources and referrals for clients.

**4. *What other business do you think the Eastside need?***

- |                          |                                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ♦ Manufacturing company  | ♦ Recreation center for Hmong youth |
| ♦ More asian restaurants | ♦ More farmer market                |
| ♦ Beauty salon           | ♦ Cooperation                       |
| ♦ Department stores      | ♦ Family business                   |
| ♦ Commercial building    | ♦ Charter School                    |

♦ Bank

♦ More parking for business to grow

**5. *What changes have you noticed in the Eastside Hmong community within the past five years?***

- ♦ More professional businesses such as a Medical clinic, Counseling service, Real Estate agencies, and mortgage companies have move to the East side.
- ♦ More Hmong homeowners and expansion of Hmong businesses.
- ♦ Assistance from Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) cases has decreased for Hmong families.
- ♦ Hmong families are relying less on their relatives for financial support.

**6. *What culturally specific services does your program provide for the Hmong people?***

The interviewee's provide culturally specific services to the Hmong community on the EastSide by providing oriental foods and videos, culturally daycare for children, culturally appropriate services to Hmong client such as translation/interpretation and transportation and provide culturally counseling service of mental health issues to the Hmong people.

**7. *What are the outcomes of your agency's service of the Hmong population?***

- ♦ The counseling service agency provided different opportunity on how to do intervention and prevention for Hmong on mental health issues.
- ♦ The two oriental stores encourage Hmong people to start their own business that are close to the Eastside Hmong community.
- ♦ The home daycare provider provides culturally daycare service to all races.
- ♦ The social service agency provides good and reliable services to Hmong people.

**Conclusion**

From the findings, this research shows that the job and economic development for Hmong businesses are growing but there are still great concerns for them. The concerns for business

are that they're still lacking many skills and support from outside resources to support them. The lack of skills and resources are what's keeping their business from not growing on the EastSide.

## **Resources on Economic Development on Eastside**

<b><u>Resource</u></b>	<b><u>Purpose it serves</u></b>
<b>1. Phalen Corridor Initiative</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>
<b>2. Non-profits</b>	<b>Advocacy, Education and Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eastside Neighborhood Development Corporation (ESNDC)</li> <li>• Asian Development Corporation (ADC)</li> <li>• Northeast Neighborhood Development Company (NENDC)</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Business Association</b>	<b>Advocacy and Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White Bear Business Association</li> <li>• Payne Area Business Association (PABA)</li> <li>• Eastside Area Business Association (ESABA)</li> <li>• Minnesota Hmong Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Local Government</b>	<b>Funding, Education and Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and Economic Development (PED)</li> <li>• License, Inspection and Environmental Protection (LIEP)</li> </ul>	
<b>5. District Planning Council</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District 1,2,4 and 5</li> </ul>	
<b>6. Hmong Business</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>
<b>7. Banks</b>	<b>Advocacy and Funding</b>
<b>8. Eastside Politician</b>	<b>Advocacy and funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steve Trimble</li> <li>• Dan Bostrom</li> </ul>	
<b>9. All institutions</b>	<b>Advocacy, Education and Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education (community organization)</li> <li>• Health</li> </ul>	

## **Economic development (non-Eastside)**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1. State, local and federal</b>         | <b>Funding</b>                         |
| • Department of Trade Economic Development |  |
| <b>2. Chamber of Commerce</b>              | <b>Advocacy</b>                        |
| • St. Paul                                 |  |
| • Midway Chamber of Commerce               |  |
| <b>3. Hmong Business</b>                   | <b>Advocacy</b>                        |
| <b>4. Hmong non-profit organizations</b>   | <b>Advocacy and Education</b>          |
| <b>5. Mainstream businesses</b>            | <b>Advocacy and Funding</b>            |
| • 3m                                       |  |
| • Honeywell                                |  |
| • St. Paul Company                         |  |
| • Others                                   |  |
| <b>6. Farmers Market</b>                   | <b>Funding and Advocacy</b>            |
| • St. Paul                                 |  |
| • Minneapolis                              |  |
| <b>7. Hmong farmers</b>                    | <b>Funding</b>                         |
| <b>8. Hmong festival/events/social</b>     | <b>Advocacy, Education and Funding</b> |

## **Recommendations**

- Businesses need to build more relationship and collaboration with other businesses and non-profits organization on the Eastside.
- Affordable health insurance for small businesses.
- More parking for businesses on Eastside.
- Office of License, Inspection and Environment protection (LIEP) needs to be more culturally sensitive to Asian business on zoning and coding issues.
- Improve businesses by raising quality and standards.
- Provide and offer business service to meet needs/wants of community.

- Training
  - Technical training and business skills.
- Role models for business growth or expansion.
- City, Federal and State programs need to target Hmong business.
- Hmong Chamber of Commerce needs to continue to support and expand programs.
- More focus research on the Hmong business community.

## **WORKFORCE READINESS**

The purpose of this research study is to determine if the work readiness program is effective for the Hmong people on the East Side of St. Paul. The Hmong is a group of people that immigrated to Minnesota in 1976. When the Hmong people first arrived in Minnesota, most of them depended on public assistance because of the lack of skills, resources and training to assist them to be self-sufficient. The majority of the parents and elders were unable to find and/or hold a suitable job to support their family because they could not speak, read or write English.

### **Research Process**

The goal of this research was to conduct a focus group with the students who attend the work readiness program at Resources Hub. There are seven Hmong women in the program but only four participated in the focus group. All the members in the focus group live on the East Side of St. Paul. The reason for this focus group is to find the needs and concerns of work readiness for Eastside Hmong residents.

The data collection consisted of six survey questions that were answered by each student in the classroom. The students and the facilitators discussed the six survey questions as a group. After the data was collected from the focus group, the responses to the questions were summarized with the group to make sure that the needs and concerns were addressed as they wished.



## **The Findings**

The work readiness focus group at Resources Hub, the finding is that the program is working for the group. All the students feel positive about the program. About **50%** of the class feel that since they attended the program, they felt great about being able to fill out their own applications without the help of a translator and **25%** of the class stated that they have not gone out to look for a job yet. They are taking the class to help prepare them for a future job search. The other **25%** stated that they were not ready to fill out the application or prepare for an interview yet because they have never been in school. They did not feel that they had the confidence or skills to look for a job yet. They felt that they needed more time to prepare themselves before looking for a job. This was due to their lack of English speaking skills. However, they do see this class as a beginning for them.

The six following questions and answers were collected from the students during the focus group:

### ***1. How do you feel about taking part in this program?***

The group felt good since taking this course for the past month. They had learned how to fill out applications and how to prepare for interviews. One woman expressed, "The program really helped me. Since I have participated in this program I have learned how to fill out applications by writing my name, address, city, state, and zip code on the application." At the beginning of the classes most of them did not know how to fill out applications. They always depended on someone to help fill them out.

### ***2. How do you think the MFIP rules affect your family?***

A few members in the group said that MFIP really affects their family because they can not get a good job to support their family. They want to work. But because of the language barrier

and lack of skills they are preventing from getting a good paying job. They feel frustrated because they can not fill out the applications and many employers have turned them down. Some employers don't even give them a chance to fill out the application or talk to them. They feel that most of the employers discriminate against them because they do not know how to read, write or speak English. Some members, who have been working said, "We also feel discriminated against on the job because we can not speak English well." "We can do the job well but we can not communicate, so the employer does not want to give them a raise when we have a review."

**3. *What do you like best about this program?***

- Learning how to fill out applications and preparing for a job interview.
- Learning basic English that can be used on the job.
- The instructor because she is Hmong and can explain more to them. She can explain both in English and Hmong so it will make it easier for them to understand. This way they can learn how to read, write and speak English at the same time.

**4. *What could this program or other program do to help you?***

The group would like to have more classes in this program. Presently, the class is taught two nights a week and this is not enough for them. They would like to have the classes held at least three nights a week. This way they can learn more. They would like to learn more English that is related to jobs in order to communicate with their employers and co-workers. The group feels that the program really helped them. The group would like to have classes that are held at night so that more people can attend it.

**5. *Do you think this program will benefit you in getting a job?***

The group thinks that this program will benefit them in getting a job. In this program they have learned how to fill out applications and learn basic English that will help them on the job. Even if some employers do not hire them, they are still proud that they took this class because they have attained self-esteem.

**6. *Could you tell us where you live on the Eastside? (Street name and Zip Code).***

There are seven members in this group but only four member's showed up for the class. Three of them are from zip code 55106 and the other is from zip code 55101. They lived in district 1, 2, 4 and 5. Their ages range from 30 to 44 years old. This group has been in the United States from 5 to 20 years. They are limited in English and are willing to take a job that is suitable for them. Most of them are looking for assembly jobs.

**Conclusion and challenges**

This research proves that Resources Hub is providing adequate skills, resources and support for students to prepare for a job. Skills such as learning to fill out applications, doing resume's and preparing for a job interview have helped students to have more self-esteem and confidence when searching for a job.

This research is not a comprehensive study of the overall work readiness program at Resource Hub, it only covers a small program on how work readiness is effective for the Hmong people. This research can be used as a resource to understand a small portion of the Hmong people who reside on the East Side of St. Paul. Other resources may use this research project to pursue an in-dept knowledge of how this type of program will benefit the Hmong people.

The researches see the challenges as:

- Language barrier in finding a suitable job
- Lack of skills for middle-age Hmong because of no educational background
- Discrimination on the job
- Communication

## **Workforce Eastside Resources**

<b><u>Resources</u></b>	<b><u>Purpose it serves</u></b>
<b>1. Eastside Job Bank</b>	<b>Education and Advocacy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job programs</li> <li>• Technical assistance</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Eastside Work Resources Hub</b>	<b>Education and Advocacy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare to work</li> <li>• Eastside Metro Organization and cooperation</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Hmong non-profits</b>	<b>Advocacy and Education</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women Association of Hmong and Lao</li> <li>• Lao Family Community of Minnesota (Arcade)</li> <li>• Hmong American Partnership</li> <li>• Hmong Minnesota Pacific Association</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Hmong Temporary Agencies</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>
<b>5. Phalen Corridor Initiative (PCI)</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>
<b>6. Business Association</b>	<b>Advocacy and Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White Bear Business Association</li> </ul>	

- Payne Area Business Association (PABA)
- Eastside Area Business Association (ESABA)
- Minnesota Hmong Chamber of Commerce

**7. Employers (big businesses and institutions) Advocacy, Education and Funding**

- 3M and Williams Hill
- St. Paul School Districts
- Metropolitan State University
- Public Housing Agency
- Medical Clinics
- Grocery Stores
- Transportation

**Workforce Resources (not on eastside)**

<b><u>Resources</u></b>	<b><u>Purpose it serves</u></b>
<b>1. Job services</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>
<b>2. Colleges/Technical Schools</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>3. State/Federal Agency</b>	<b>Advocacy and Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare Department</li> <li>• City Program</li> <li>• County</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Non-Profit Organization</b>	<b>Advocacy and Education</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lao Family Community of Minnesota</li> </ul>	

- Hmong American Partnership

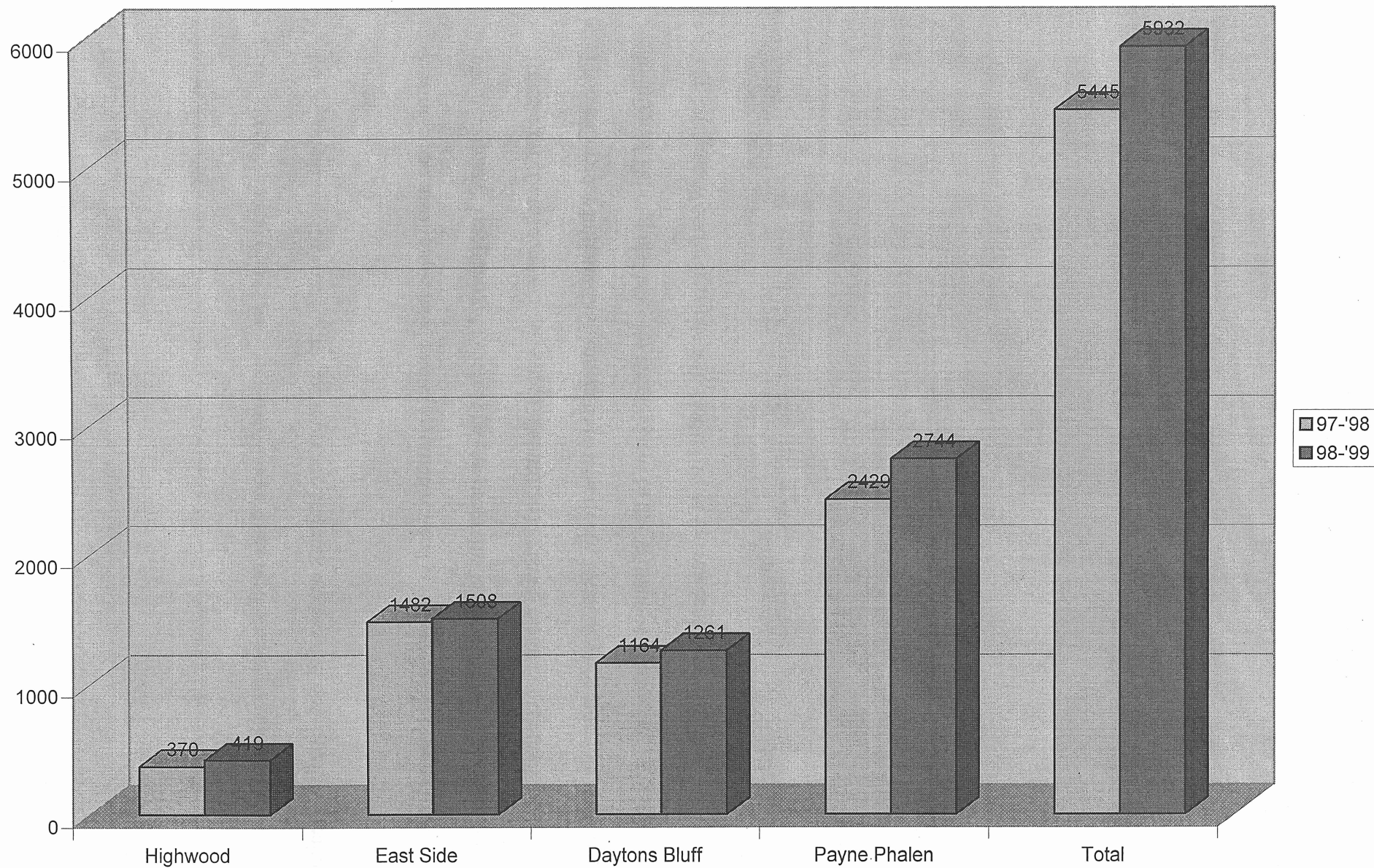
## **5. Hmong Businesses**

## **Advocacy**

### **Recommendation**

- Resources Hub and others need to provide more work readiness classes at night.
- Employment center needs to provide more job-training courses for non-English speaking Hmong.
- Business and institutions need to create initiatives and collaboration between Hmong non-profits, Hmong Temporary Agencies and job programs targeting Hmong people.
- Hmong people take greater advantage and utilized existing resources on the Eastside.
- Phalen Corridor Initiative and others need to actively, if not already, promote the hiring and training of Hmong residents for employment in the Williams Hill Business Center.
- The Eastside Workforce needs to be reflective of the residents who live there for employment.

## EastSide Hmong K12 Student Population - '97-'98 and '98-'99 School Year



Source: Wilder Reserch and Urban Coalition



# EastSide Hmong K12 Student Population - 1997-98 School Year

